

Let's Exercise, **BABY!**

By Tricia Streit Perez, MS, ATC, LAT

Fitness before, during and after pregnancy is an essential part of motherhood. Regular exercise during pregnancy has been shown to decrease fat retention, result in shorter and less complicated labor, increase energy levels, and shorten postpartum recovery time. In addition, women who exercise during pregnancy report less lower-back pain, depression, constipation, swelling, nausea, leg cramps, varicose veins, insomnia, fatigue, and incontinence. Physical activity during pregnancy also reduces the incidence of gestational diabetes by half, the risk of pre-eclampsia by thirty five percent, the need for forceps or C-section by seventy five percent, and the need to intervene due to fetal heart-rate abnormalities by fifty percent! As if you need any more reason to be active, exercising women experience fewer incidences of postpartum depression.

In 2002, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) created guidelines for exercise during pregnancy. By following these guidelines and doing what feels right, your exercise will benefit you and your baby!

DO'S

- Get permission from your physician before starting an exercise program.
- Let your body be your guide. Your workout should feel moderately difficult, yet you should still be able to carry on a conversation.
- Get at least 30 minutes of exercise per day on most days of the week.
- Swim! It's a perfect exercise for balance, cardiovascular and strength training, while at the same time reducing swelling in your extremities.
- Participate in low-impact activities only. Your hormonal changes can make your joints more susceptible to injury.
- Take in plenty of nutritious calories. The demands of pregnancy require 300 extra calories per day, plus the calorie requirements of exercise.
- Eat a snack composed of complex carbohydrates, protein and fat one hour before exercise, and make sure to replenish your fuel supply afterward as well.
- Drink plenty of water (6-8 oz. for every 15-20 minutes of activity).
- Include stretching, especially your inner thighs, lower back, hamstrings, chest and calves.
- Celebrate your pregnant body!



DON'TS

- Use your heart rate as a guide to exercise difficulty. Because of the major changes in your blood volume, this is not an accurate indicator.
- Participate in high-risk activities, such as biking, skiing, horseback riding, or gymnastics. Your center-of-gravity has changed, and may make you more prone to falling.
- Exercise while lying on your back after the first trimester. The excess weight of your uterus can compromise the blood flow to you and your baby.
- Exercise to exhaustion.
- Hold your breath during exercise.
- Exercise for weight loss during pregnancy.

Even if you never exercised before pregnancy, now is the time to begin a program, for the benefit of yourself and your baby. Your routine should be safe, fun and beneficial. Whether it's a walk with the one that you love, a swim, or a trip to the gym... get out there, find an activity that you enjoy, and do it regularly.

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